

Portraits: Activity 1 - Queen Victoria

TEACHERS' NOTES

Learning Objectives

- To increase children's knowledge and understanding of Queen Victoria and the Victorians
- To develop children's research skills using historical sources, in particular portraits, photographs, paintings and ephemera, to learn about the Victorians

Cross-curricular Links

- Art

Sources



Source 1. A photographic portrait of Queen Victoria, c1890,



Source 2. Queen Victoria, Prince Albert and The Royal Family, print of an 1846 painting by Franz Winterhalter printed in *The Graphic: Diamond Jubilee Celebration Number*, 1897



Source 3. Sunlight Soap Advertisement printed in *The Graphic: Diamond Jubilee Celebration Number*, 1897

Portraits: Activity 1 - Queen Victoria

TEACHERS' NOTES

Source 1

This is a formal portrait of the Queen.

Clothing, accessories other props include: rich fabric dress, lace, fan, headdress, jewellery (earrings, necklace and rings) plus ornate chair, ornate plant stand and expensive patterned carpet.

She is shown in an upright pose suggesting majesty, proud, commanding, regal. Note also the down-turned mouth and stern, sad(?) eyes.

Source 2

The painter Winterhalter has been very clever here. As Queen Victoria is the most important woman in Britain and the Empire, she should be most important and she is shown in the centre of the group. But in the Victorian family the man was the most important figure so Prince Albert is painted in profile making him stand out more. Instead of one there are two most important figures in this painting. Note that Source 6 is a print made from a well-known oil painting from 1846 by a famous Victorian artist, Franz Xaver Winterhalter (1805 - 1873).

Features shown in the painting and what they are meant to illustrate

Queen Victoria	
Crown	Royalty
Jewellery	Wealth
Sash	Symbol of rank
Expression	She looks sweet and serene, but also serious - as Queen she had many responsibilities on her mind apart from her family.
Prince Albert	
Diamond Star, Sash, and garter below his knee	Symbols of rank and nobility; the Order of the Garter also indicates loyalty
Expression	Solemn and proud. Head turned towards his wife and eldest son, indicating fatherly qualities.
Albert & Victoria's hands almost touching	To signify their closeness.
Eldest son	
Where is he standing and why?	Next to the monarch because he is heir to the throne.
What is he wearing?	Russian costume.
Daughters	
What are they shown doing and why?	Playing with and looking after the baby, to emphasise the nurturing role of women.
Baby's fur-edged robe	Wealth and royal status (the fur is ermine)
Ornate table with flowers and fruit	Wealth
Drapes behind them	Wealth and grandeur

Portraits: Activity 1 - Queen Victoria

TEACHERS' NOTES

Source 3

This is an advertisement to 'sell' soap. It does this by association with Queen Victoria. Her image (as a young woman in 1837 and after 60 years on the throne in 1897) is in the advert and at the bottom it notes 'By special appointment to her majesty'. Everyone would recognise the Queen and many would have a photograph of her in their home to emphasise their loyalty. The implication is, if it is good enough for the Queen then it must be good enough for you.

Note: showing her as a young woman could be a subtle indication that the soap is not only good for older ladies!

Even in an advertisement, the emphasis is on Victoria's position as Queen and her power as head of the British Empire, rather than the qualities of the soap itself.

Note:

- Flags (Union Flag on the right, signifying the country and Empire, Royal Standard on the left, signifying the Queen)
- Crown (centre above the two portraits)
- Decorations (centre below portraits) Note: the phrase 'Heavens Light our Guide' was the motto of the Viceroy and Governor General of India and used on the insignia of the Star of India
- Names of different countries of the Empire with their coats of arms

Things to look for in a photographic or painted portrait of an individual or group

Clothing; accessories such as jewellery, medals and other decorations; pose and expression; furniture, props and background; plus, in group portraits, where people are positioned in relation to each other, who they are looking at and what they are doing.

Compare sources 1 and 3

Source 1 is a formal portrait intended to convey the majesty of Queen Victoria as she celebrates 60 years on the throne. She is very much the focus of the picture and all the props are meant to reinforce the idea of her position of authority and responsibility.

Source 3 also features the Queen, as a young woman and 60 years older. There are also reminders of the British Empire over which she ruled, an Empire of which many Victorians were very proud. 'Sunlight Soap' and 'Soap Makers by Special Appointment to Her Majesty' are the only reference to the product that is being sold. The unspoken message is that people who love and respect their Queen will be happy to use the same soap that the Queen uses.